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ABSTRACT

This project was conducted to determine whether using videotapes, designed for the purpose of teaching English pronunciation, would improve the pronunciation of English as a second language learners at the Lebanon Adult Education Center in Pennsylvania. The videotapes used were entitled "Perfect English Pronunciation." Learners were given a pretest that consisted of groups of words that used various sounds in English pronunciation. These sounds were heard in the beginning, middle, or end of words. Throughout the project, the instructor observed the learners and kept field notes. At the end of the project, the learners were given a posttest. Each learner in this 12-week intermediate class showed at least an 80 percent improvement in the English pronunciation of discrete sounds. A few students demonstrated a 95 percent improvement. Students also demonstrated greater confidence in their ability to communicate as a result of the project. (YLB)

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PRODUCT

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Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

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Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

A great concern among the ESL learners at the Lebanon Adult Education Center is correct English pronunciation. I find this to be one of the top priorities with my intermediate class. I conducted this project to find out if using videotapes that were designed for the purpose of teaching English pronunciation would improve the learners' pronunciation. The videotapes that were used are entitled Perfect English Pronunciation. The learners were given a pretest. The pretest consisted of groups of words that utilized the various sounds that are used in English pronunciation. These sounds were heard in the beginning, middle, or end of words. Throughout the project, I observed the learners and kept field notes. At the end of the project, the learners were given a posttest. The results were used as the criterion to determine success.

II. PROBLEM

The Lebanon Adult Education Center is located in an urban setting, which is comprised of a multi-cultural community. As a result, my class's population is also multi-cultural. The nationalities that are represented in my class are Cambodian, Vietnamese, Korean, Puerto Rican, Dominican Republican, Mexican, Colombian, Tunisian, Russian, Haitian, and East Indian. As you can see, this is a diverse group. As diverse as they may be, they all have at least one thing in common. They all want to learn the English language, and "perfect" pronunciation is very important to each of them.

Many of the sounds that we use in the English language are foreign to our learners. They do not use these sounds in their own language and therefore do not know how or what to do to produce these sounds. This is the reason the problem with pronunciation is so prevalent. As stated before, I currently teach the intermediate ESL class. However, having previously taught the beginner class, I know emphasis is placed on "Survival English". Once a learner completes the beginner class and advances to the intermediate class, it seems that pronunciation becomes one of his or her top priorities.

Improvement of the learners' pronunciation would not only benefit the learners but also our school. Both the learners' communication and reading would improve greatly. As a result, the learners would be more confident and more likely to converse with others in English. This may occur in the work place, their children's school, the doctor's office, the grocery store,

etc. The learners will also be able to better communicate with each other in the classroom and thus form friendships with their classmates. Some of the learners are shy and reluctant to read aloud or express themselves because of mispronunciation, If the pronunciation problems were solved, they would be more willing to participate in class. Whomever the learners come in contact with should notice a change. When questioned about his or her English improvement, the learner will hopefully credit our school. As this information is passed from person to person, our enrollment should increase.

III. PLANNING

The proposed intervention for this project was videotapes. These videotapes were designed for the purpose of teaching English pronunciation. The learners are in class twelve hours each week if they attend regularly. Each class is three hours long and held four mornings a week. I decided to use half of the class time each day for this project. I didn't want to overwhelm the learners. The timeline for the project was ten weeks.

The use of a television, VCR, and videotapes was needed for the project. But the most important thing needed was the cooperation of the learners. In order to collect data throughout the project, field notes, logs, and tests of the learners' performances were utilized. The criterion for success was based on an 80% improvement rate among the learners.

The pretests and posttests will provide the means to evaluate the project. The learners will be given a pretest, which consists of groups of words utilizing various sounds that are used in English pronunciation. These sounds are found in the beginning, middle, or end of words. The sounds with which the learners had difficulty would be charted. At the end of the project, the learners would be given a posttest with the same groups of words. As stated, the criterion for success would be an 80% improvement rate among the learners.

The attendance rate of the learners would have a deep impact on the project; therefore, I only included those learners who attended regularly. The shyness of some of the learners was another constraint that had to be addressed. I had to find a way to get them comfortable enough to actively participate. Because the learners feel more relaxed and talkative during the last half of the period, I decided to conduct the project during this time. Also, because the classes at the Lebanon Adult Education Center have an open entry and open exit policy, I only included learners that were

enrolled during the beginning of the project.

To conduct this project, I needed the approval of both my administrator and the participating learners. After receiving approval from my administrator, I explained the project to the selective learners and received their verbal consent.

IV. ACTION

The learners were given a pretest before viewing the videotapes. I compiled a list of words that utilized the various sounds used in English pronunciation. These sounds were heard in the beginning, middle, or end of the words. I would say each word and have the learners repeat the word. I made a chart for each learner and charted the results of the pretest. After testing all the learners, I compared the results of each one. I compiled a list of the common and isolated sounds that were mispronounced. Most of the learners shared the same mispronunciation errors. Although there were some sounds that the learners could pronounce without any difficulty, we viewed both videotapes in their entirety. Including the testing time, the project took twelve weeks to complete.

I decided to use the last half of the class period for the project. This gave the learners time to warm up and feel more comfortable. I knew that they would be more reluctant to participate during the beginning of class. Participation was very important because the video instructed the learners to repeat the sounds, words, and sentences.

We began with the video, which covered the pronunciation of consonants. At first, some of the learners were too shy to repeat the sounds. They were reluctant to open their mouths and imitate the models. But with the encouragement of some of the other learners and me, they participated.

What originally started out as a pronunciation lesson soon turned into a vocabulary lesson as well. Many of the words used in the video were foreign to the learners. The video introduced a sound and demonstrated how to produce and pronounce the sound. Words and sentences were then given for the learners to repeat. After the lesson for each individual sound, I paused or stopped the video to review the lesson. We also did different exercises to further reinforce the sounds that proved to be more difficult. After we completed the consonant video, we proceeded with the video that covered vowels, diphthongs, and word endings. We followed the same procedure as we had done with the consonant video.

During the twelve-week period, I carefully noted the pronunciation of the learners during the first half of the class. I listened as they conversed with each other in order to see if they were putting into practice what they had learned. After viewing and reviewing both videotapes, the learners were given a posttest. The posttest included the same groups of words that were included in the pretest.

V. RESULTS AND REFLECTION

The results of the project were positive. Each learner showed at least an 80% improvement in their English pronunciation of discrete sounds. There were a few students that demonstrated a 95% improvement.

The project proved to be very beneficial for the learners. It has not only helped with their English pronunciation but has also helped them to develop more confidence in themselves. In class they are communicating more with each other, they are not just seeking those who share their language. I have heard the learners trying to correct and help other learners with pronunciation. The learners are volunteering more to read aloud in class, and their reading has greatly improved. They have told me that they can now better converse with others in their communities and also feel better about handling their own affairs.

The fact that the project was a success was demonstrated by meeting the 80% improvement criterion. But more importantly, I feel the attitude and the confidence of the learners better demonstrate the success of the project.